

Autobiography *for* the body that won't leave
for Rukmin Katwaroo (1936-2020)

By Carmin Wong

I was born there, in a city of gold
panned near the watershed of the northwest river
I was born there on a cloudless Spring Day
a spell of warm weather and my ma's breast
was my first and earliest feast. Though
these days rise differently. Uncertainty squanders
the inside of me. This body
a nomenclature of a place once belonged
to a home forgotten not for good but
for the day it becomes for certain. I was born
there, where every daughter knew of dust
and sandstone, this struggle the same as
the structure of sinking. I was, am still
a mouth-wide fool for love, that is more
than I let on, more than I have seen
in those ceremonious matrimones. I think
the world of daughters, myself
a once idyllic cousin of the moon
and the same of rebellious women
who want the sanctuary of other women
to grapple with what is whole
that there's no telling the difference
between cold feet and wet women
and so, I was created
by living laughter into a belly
of whistling rhymes and
improper whines. So, I think
there is hope
wherein a world where
tears can admire a body so beautifully
I was born with this face
all my own but
half my ma's
A self-portrait of longing
of return
My ma: a canvas of
what little and too much
I know of me
and still, she

is as beautiful as _____
I wish there were words to tell
how I bloomed
from women that be
how my grandmothers were brought
to a land made from foreign things, unfree
She and them, the servants
who, too, did dream (I believe)
her body has known a life that precedes me
and yet, I feel it in the frailness of my own bones
how soft it feels to rest in between the now
and our short-lived memories. This body
a cocoon for rustic dreams and breaking free
I think, there is a place for birthing
the broken and the beautiful
and babies who grow into
beings that outlive and tire and sing
of the ones who held them
first. My grandmother
The too early departed
The working and the feeble
This is a body of memories
of places
of all my people
my people's people I call my own
I was born from shared blood
a holi trail
This body a celestial thing, I know
this feeling is not mine alone
but of my ma
an antecedent land
our arrival
the newness of Spring
our harvest